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## **Advisory Announcement**

*For Immediate Release: April 16, 2020*

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# **UPPER COOK INLET**

## **2020 OUTLOOK FOR COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHING**

### **Sockeye Salmon Forecast**

A run of approximately 4.3 million sockeye salmon is forecasted to return to Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) in 2020, with an expected harvest by all user groups of 2.5 million. The commercial fishery harvest in 2020 is estimated to be approximately 1.7 million sockeye salmon, which is 1.0 million fish less than the 20-year average annual commercial sockeye salmon harvest of 2.8 million fish.

The run forecast for the Kenai River is approximately 2.2 million, which is 1.4 million less than (38%) the 20-year average run of 3.6 million. In 2020, the predominant age classes are projected to be age 1.3 (63%), age 1.2 (17%), and age 2.3 (13%). The 10-year mean absolute percent error (MAPE) for the set of models used for the 2020 Kenai River sockeye salmon forecast is 19%.

The Kasilof River sockeye salmon run forecast is 723,000 fish, which is 26% less than the 20-year average of 971,000. The predominant age classes in the run forecast are age 1.3 (37%), age 1.2 (29%), age 1.3 (41%) and age 2.2 (26%). The 10-year MAPE for the set of models used for the 2020 Kasilof River sockeye salmon run forecast is 21%.

The Susitna River sockeye salmon run forecast is 571,000, which is 49% greater than the 20-year average of 384,000. This forecast was derived using mean return per spawner by age class and mark-recapture estimates of spawner abundance for brood years 2006–2014. The 5-year MAPE for this forecast method is 23%. The predominant age classes in the 2020 Susitna sockeye salmon run forecast are age 1.2 (25%) and age 1.3 (54%).

The Fish Creek sockeye salmon run forecast is 121,000, which is 35,000 fish or 42% greater than the 20-year average run of 86,000. The predominant age classes in the 2020 Fish Creek run forecast are age 1.2 (58%) and age 1.3 (22%). The 10-year MAPE for the Fish Creek sockeye salmon run forecast is 70%.

## **2020 Sockeye Salmon Forecasts and Escapement Goals**

System	Forecast	Goals <sup>a</sup>
Kenai River <sup>b,c</sup>	2,231,000	1,000,000–1,300,000
Kasilof River <sup>b,d</sup>	723,000	140,000–320,000
Susitna River	571,000	
Larson Lake	N/A	15,000–35,000
Chelatna Lake	N/A	20,000–45,000
Judd Lake	N/A	15,000–40,000
Fish Creek	121,000	15,000–45,000
Unmonitored Systems <sup>e</sup>	624,000	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,270,000</b>	

<sup>a</sup> Goals listed here are as follows: Kenai River: Inriver; Kasilof River: Biological Escapement Goal (BEG); Susitna River: SEG (weir goals); and Fish Creek: Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG).

<sup>b</sup> Kenai River goal is DIDSON-based; Kasilof river is Aris-based.

<sup>c</sup> Kenai River SEG is 750,000–1,300,000 sockeye salmon; was 700,000 – 1,200,000 until 2020 UCI BOF meeting.

<sup>d</sup> Kasilof River optimal escapement goal (OEG) is 140,000–370,000 sockeye salmon. BEG was 160,000 – 340,000 until 2020 UCI BOF meeting.

<sup>e</sup> Unmonitored systems are estimated to be 15% of monitored systems.

## **Summary Outline of Regulatory Changes from the February 2020 Alaska Board of Fisheries Meeting**

### **Escapement Goal Changes Affecting Commercial Fisheries Management**

- Inriver goals and sustainable escapement goal (SEG) changes for Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon:
  - SEG raised to 750,000–1,300,000 fish.
  - Inriver goal (Tiers) raised:
    - 1.0–1.3 million (for runs < 2.3 million)
    - 1.1–1.4 million (for runs of 2.3–4.6 million)
    - 1.2–1.6 million (for runs > 4.6 million)
- Kenai River late-run king salmon optimal escapement goal (OEG) created:
  - 15,000–30,000 large king salmon
- Kasilof River sockeye salmon biological escapement goal (BEG) lowered to 140,000–320,000 fish.
- Kasilof River sockeye salmon OEG lowered to 140,000–370,000 fish.
- Deshka River king salmon SEG lowered to 9,000–18,000 fish.

### **Specific Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Changes**

- Districtwide expansion of Area 1 opening not possible from July 16 to 31.
- 1% rule calculation starts on August 1 and includes all openings for calculation.
- No districtwide fishing after August 1; regular periods restricted to Drift Area 1 and Expanded Kenai/Kasilof/AP Sections.
- D-Boat fishing now allowed in Chinitna Bay.
- Clarification of boundaries in Chinitna Bay.

### **Set Gillnet Fishery Management Changes**

- **Northern District (ND)**
  - Entire ND king fishery restricted to 9 hours if Deshka River sport king salmon fishery is restricted to no bait.
  - Entire ND king fishery restricted to 6 hours if Deshka River sport king salmon fishery is restricted to no retention.
  - Susitna River sockeye salmon were removed as a stock of yield concern, but restrictive actions to reduce the harvest of this stock were retained in both the ND set gillnet and Central District drift gillnet management plans.
  
- **Upper Subdistrict East Side Set Gillnet (ESSN)**
  - Kasilof Section season opens on June 20, but on any day between June 20 and June 24, the fishery will be closed by emergency order (EO) if < 30,000 sockeye salmon are in the Kasilof River.
  - 600-foot openers are possible for all ESSN sections and do not include hour restrictions.
  - North Kalifornsky Beach (NKB) stat area can open July 1 to July 8 restricted to within 600 feet of shore, including net restrictions (no more than 4.75 in. mesh and 29 or less meshes deep).
  - East Foreland Section now affected by all restrictions of the Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan (KRLKSMP).
  - 1% rule starts August 1 and includes 600-foot openings for calculation.
  - All fishing periods restricted by the KRLKSMP, other than those restricted to within 600 feet of shore, shall be conducted with gear restriction options.
  - KRLKSMP includes a new paired restriction provision for ESSN fishery and sport fishery.
    - If king salmon sport fishery is closed to retention of fish > 34 inches, the ESSN fishery is restricted to 36 hours by EO only, including a Friday no fishing window.
  - ESSN restricted to 36 hours per week by EO after August 1, without a closed fishery window if the sport fishery is restricted on July 31; ESSN fishery remains restricted until the king salmon OEG is achieved.
  - Hours fished in the KRSHA apply to weekly hourly restrictions in the KRLKSMP.
  
- **Chinitna Bay, Western, Kustatan, and Kalgin Island Subdistrict**
  - No significant changes.
    - Clarification of Chinitna Bay and Big River sockeye salmon fishery boundaries.

**For more information about the 2020 Upper Cook Inlet Alaska Board of Fisheries meeting, please visit the web site below:**

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fisheriesboard.meetinginfo&date=02-07-2020&meeting=anchorage>

## **2020 Fishing Strategies**

### **Set Gillnet Salmon Fishery Overview and Management for Northern District**

- Since 2011, management actions as per the *Northern District King Salmon Management Plan* (NDKSMP) for the Northern District (ND) directed king salmon set gillnet fishery have included area closures, time restrictions, and/or regularly scheduled fishing period closures in order to reduce the harvest of northern Cook Inlet king salmon. However, even with restrictions in sport and commercial fisheries in 2018 and 2019, the Deshka River failed to achieve its king salmon escapement goal. Total passage in 2018 was 8,594 fish, and 9,755 fish in 2019. The 2020 Deshka River preseason forecast of 10,570 fish suggests harvest will need to be very limited in order to achieve the newly modified SEG of 9,000–18,000 fish. Based on this low forecast, and recent low king salmon production throughout the Susitna Drainage, the Division of Sport Fish issued an Emergency Order (EO) prohibiting retention of king salmon in units 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the Susitna River drainage, while unit 2 was closed entirely to king salmon fishing.
- As directed by the NDKSMP, the 2020 directed king salmon commercial fishery in the ND will be restricted to 6-hour fishing periods in all subdistricts in response to the emergency order limiting the start of the 2020 Deshka River sport fishery to no retention. For the 2020 season, the commercial fishing periods affected by this restriction will be May 25, and June 1, 8, 15, and 22. Escapement of king salmon into the Deshka River will be closely monitored. If the run is stronger than expected and retention of king salmon is allowed in the Deshka River sport fishery, reestablishing 9 or 12 hour openings in the directed king salmon commercial fishery may occur.
- Beginning Monday, June 25, the ND set gillnet fishery will be managed per provisions found in the *Northern District Salmon Management Plan* (NDSMP). This plan provides for two 12-hour weekly fishing periods and a normal separation between nets of at least 600 feet.
- While Susitna River sockeye salmon were removed from stock of yield concern status at the 2020 board meeting, restrictive actions to fisheries that harvest this stock were retained in regulation. According to the NDSMP, the department may reduce the legal complement of gear in the ND set gillnet fishery to either one or two nets per permit from July 20 through August 6 to conserve Susitna River sockeye salmon. However, in that portion of the General Subdistrict south of the Susitna River, restrictive options for gear reduction are limited to two nets per permit after July 30.
- The fishery will be closed for the season by EO when catch and effort cease ~ October 1.

### **Set Gillnet Salmon Fishery Overview and Management for the Chinitna Bay, Western, Kustatan and Kalgin Island Subdistricts of the Central District**

- Chinitna Bay, Western, Kalgin Island, and Kustatan subdistrict management will generally follow regulatory fishing periods and schedules, except for that portion of the Western

Subdistrict south of Redoubt Point, where fishing is often allowed three days per week based on increasing harvest rates of Crescent River sockeye salmon.

- The Kalgin Island Subdistrict may also be given up to one extra fishing period per week if the Packers Lake sockeye salmon assessment shows that the escapement goal is projected to be achieved.
- The fisheries will be closed for the season by EO when catch and effort cease ~ October 1.

### **Overview of Upper Subdistrict ESSN and Central District Drift Fisheries**

#### **Upper Subdistrict ESSN Fishery**

- The preseason estimate for Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon is 2.2 million fish. If the Kenai River late-run king salmon OEG is projected to be achieved without restrictions, inseason management of the ESSN fishery will fall under the *Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan* (KRLSSMP). For runs < 2.3 million fish. The KRLSSMP stipulates the department shall meet the SEG range of 750,000–1,300,000, achieve an inriver goal of 1.0 to 1.3 million fish, two regular fishing periods plus up to 24 hours of EO time are allowed each week, and there are no closed fishery windows.
- The 2020 Kenai River late-run king salmon forecast projects a total run of 22,707 “large” (>75cm mid eye to tail fork) fish. The OEG for Kenai River late-run king salmon is 15,000–30,000 large fish. If the run returns as forecasted, it would rank as the 6th lowest run, measured as 29th out of 35 years, but would be approximately 60% greater than the 2019 preliminary total run estimate of 12,780 large fish. Based on the forecasted run size and if harvest rates are average in both sport and commercial fisheries, the Kenai River late-run king salmon large fish OEG may not be met without a reduction in sport and commercial harvest of this stock. If the Kenai River sport fishery is restricted to either no bait, no retention, or no retention of fish > 34 inches, then the management of the entire ESSN fishery from June 20 through August 15 falls under provisions found in the KRLKSMP (5AAC 21.359 (e)(3)(g)). The paired restrictive provisions include fishing hour reductions, and mandatory gear restrictions. Additionally, all fishing periods under the KRLKSMP in any section may now be restricted to within 600 feet of shore, but hours fished do not count toward weekly hourly restrictions.

#### **Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery**

- The department manages the UCI drift gillnet fleet primarily under the guidance of 5 AAC 21.353 *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* (CDDGFMP). The purpose of this management plan is to ensure adequate escapement of salmon into northern Cook Inlet drainages and to provide the department with management guidelines.
- The drift gillnet fishery opens the third Monday in June or June 19, whichever is later.
- Drift gillnet openings generally follow regulatory Monday/Thursday fishing periods; 7 am to 7 pm.
- Drift gillnet fishery openings are stipulated in the CDDGFMP by date and sockeye abundance.
- Additional fishing time is limited to the regular or expanded Kenai and Kasilof sections and Anchor Point Section dependent upon Kenai and Kasilof river sockeye salmon abundance and time of the season.

**Inseason Management of Upper Subdistrict ESSN and Central District Drift Gillnet Fisheries****Upper Subdistrict ESSN Fishery****Kasilof Section Prior to July 8**

- The fishing season in the Kasilof Section (Figure 1; statistical areas 244-21, 244-22, and 244-31) opens on the first regular period on or after June 20, unless the department estimates that less than 30,000 sockeye salmon are in the Kasilof River, at which time the commissioner shall close the fishery by EO from June 20 to 24. After an EO closure in this respect, the fishery could then open on any day when more than 30,000 fish are estimated to be in the Kasilof River, or June 25. If restrictions under the KRLKSMP are in effect, fishing periods will be limited to a total of 48 hours per week by EO only, with a 36-hour Friday no-fishing window. If the *Kasilof River Salmon Management Plan* (KRSMP) is in effect, fishing time will be allowed for Mon/Thurs regular 12-hour fishing periods and up to 48 additional EO hours per week, with a 36-hour Friday no-fishing window.

**North Kalifornsky Beach (NKB) Statistical Area July 1 to August 15.**

- The NKB statistical area (Figure 1; statistical area 244-32) may be open within 600 feet of mean high tide any time after July 1 if the Kasilof Section is open and the Kenai and East Foreland sections are closed.
- From July 1 to July 8, all NKB openings shall be restricted to within 600 feet of shore and limited to nets with a mesh size restriction of no more than 4.75 inches and no more than 29 meshes deep.

**Kasilof, Kenai and East Forelands Sections After July 8<sup>th</sup>**

- The Kenai and East Forelands sections fishing season opens under general regulations on or after July 8.
- Management of the ESSN set gillnet fishery will be based on the projected escapement of Kenai River late-run large king salmon, and Kenai and Kasilof river sockeye salmon passage levels. From July 8 to August 15, if the Kenai River late-run king salmon sport fishery is unrestricted, then management of the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery will follow provisions in the KRLSSMP with Mon/Thurs regular fishing periods and up to 24 additional EO hours per week and there are not any required no-fishing windows.
- For the 2020 season, paired restrictive provisions in the KRLKSMP will likely be in effect allowing up to 48 hours of fishing time per week, by EO only. All fishing periods restricted by the KRLKSMP shall include gear restrictions as per 5AAC 21.359 (e)(3)(G).
- The department will formally reassess the UCI sockeye salmon run after July 20.
- From August 1 to 15, management of the ESSN fishery is based upon meeting Kenai and Kasilof River sockeye salmon escapement objectives and the king salmon OEG in the Kenai River. If the king salmon sport fishery is restricted on July 31, the ESSN fishery will be restricted to a maximum of 36 hours of fishing time per week, by EO only, with no mandatory Friday no-fishing window. Subsequently, if at any time before August 15 the king salmon OEG is achieved in the Kenai River, the restrictive provisions of the KRLKSMP will be lifted and the management of the ESSN fishery will follow the KRLSSMP. This would entail regular

Mon/Thurs fishing periods and up to 24 hours of optional EO fishing time at run sizes < 2.3 million Kenai River sockeye salmon.

- The ESSN fishery closes no later than August 15, but from August 11 to 15, only Monday and Thursday regular 12-hour fishing periods are allowed. However, the season may close any time after July 31 if during two consecutive fishing periods the sockeye salmon harvest is less than one percent of the season total. The one-percent rule applies separately to the Kasilof Section and the Kenai/East Foreland sections, which means one of the areas could close under the one-percent rule, while the other area remains open. All fishing periods after July 31 will be used in the one-percent calculation.

### **Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery**

- The 2020 run size for Kenai River late run sockeye salmon is projected to be 2.2 million fish, which leads to the following management provisions:
  - Prior to July 8,
    - Regulations specify 12-hour districtwide regular Mon/Thurs fishing periods.
  - From July 9 through July 15,
    - For runs < 2.3 million Kenai River sockeye salmon, drift gillnet fishing is restricted for both regular fishing periods to the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof sections (Figure 2), and Drift Gillnet Area 1 (Figure 3).
    - All additional fishing time is allowed only in the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof sections.
  - From July 16 through July 31,
    - For runs < 2.3 million Kenai River sockeye salmon, fishing during both regular 12-hour fishing periods per week will be restricted to the Expanded Kenai or Expanded Kasilof sections of the Upper Subdistrict. Any additional time shall be restricted to one or more of the Expanded Kenai Section, the Expanded Kasilof Section, and the Anchor Point Section.
  - From August 1 through August 15,
    - Regular Mon/Thu fishing periods will be restricted to one or more of the following: Expanded Kenai Section, Expanded Kasilof Section, Anchor Point Sections, or Drift Gillnet Area 1. Any additional fishing time outside regular fishing periods will be dependent upon meeting sockeye and coho salmon escapement objectives but is limited to the Expanded Kenai or Kasilof and Anchor Point sections.
    - Two one-percent rules apply to drift gillnet fishing in August. If the entire ESSN fishery is closed per its own one-percent rule, or if the department determines that less than one-percent of the season's total drift gillnet sockeye salmon harvest has been taken per fishing period for two consecutive fishing periods by drift gillnets, then regular fishing periods will be restricted to Drift Gillnet Areas 3 and 4.
    - The department is now using all open periods regardless of the area(s) open to fishing to calculate the drift gillnet one-percent rule.
  - From August 16 until closed by EO,

- Drift Areas 3 and 4 are open for regular periods.
- Chinitna Bay may be opened, by EO only, based upon chum salmon escapement objectives being met or when the chum salmon run is complete.
- Drift fisheries close for the season by EO, when effort ceases, which is generally mid- to late-September.

### **Season Opening Dates**

Season opening dates in 2020 for the various fisheries around the inlet are as follows:

- *Northern District king salmon fishery*: May 25. As explained earlier in this document, there are five regular Monday fishing periods in the 2020 fishery that occur beginning Monday, May 25, and include June 1, 8, 15, and 22. The area from the wood chip dock to the Susitna River remains closed for the directed king salmon fishery in 2020.
- *Big River fishery*: June 1 and continuing through June 24, unless the 1,000 king salmon harvest limit is reached prior to that date. Weekly fishing periods are Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
- *Western Subdistrict set gillnet fishery*: June 18.
- *Drift gillnet fishery*: June 22.
- *All remaining set gillnet fisheries, except the ESSN fishery*: June 25.
- *ESSN fishery*: June 20 for the Kasilof Section (that portion south of the Blanchard Line), but only if 30,000 sockeye salmon are estimated to be in the Kasilof River. The fishery may open any day from June 20–24 based on this trigger; otherwise this area will open on Thursday, June 25. The Kenai and East Forelands sections (that portion of the Upper Subdistrict north of the Blanchard Line) will open on Thursday, July 10. By regulation, the ESSN fishery closes on Thursday, August 13, 2020.

### **COVID-19 Mandates**

Under Alaska’s Health Mandates 10, 11, and 12, commercial fishing is an Essential Business and is part of Alaska’s Essential Services and Critical Infrastructure. Commercial fishermen should ensure that all travel and other activities in support of commercial fishing operations follow protocols in Alaska COVID-19 Health Mandates. COVID-19 Health Mandates may be found here: <https://gov.alaska.gov/home/covid19-healthmandates/>



## **Set Gillnet Registration and Buoy Stickers**

All Cook Inlet setnet fishermen are required to register prior to fishing for one of three areas of Cook Inlet: 1) the Upper Subdistrict of the Central District; 2) the Northern District; or, 3) all remaining areas of Cook Inlet (Greater Cook Inlet). Once registered for one of these three areas, fishermen may fish only in the area for which they are registered for the remainder of the year. No transfers will be permitted. Dual set gillnet permit holders are required to register both permits in the same registration area. Set gillnet permit holders fishing in the Northern District or the Greater Cook Inlet area can register at ADF&G offices in Soldotna, Homer, or Anchorage or by mail. Forms are available at area offices or on the department's Upper Cook Inlet commercial fishing homepage at: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.salmon#/management>.

Fishermen wishing to register in person for the Upper Subdistrict must register in the **Soldotna ADF&G office** and must purchase buoy stickers at the time of registering. Electronic registration and buoy sticker purchasing, formerly offered by UCIERA, will be replaced online and made available online by mid-May 2020. Permit holders will need to create an ADF&G profile to access the new registration/sticker application. If fishermen have any questions about the new online registration process, please contact the Soldotna ADF&G office.

## **General information and Contact Numbers**

The UCI commercial fisheries information line will again be available by calling 262-9611. The most recent EO announcement is always available on the recorded message line and catch, escapement and test fishing information is included whenever possible. The same recording may be accessed at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.main> and clicking on the UCI Commercial Fisheries Information Recording player.

All EO announcements are also faxed or emailed to processors as quickly as possible and posted at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.salmon>. If you would like all EOs and News Releases emailed to you as soon as they are released, you can subscribe at this website for that service. For very general information, the Commercial Fisheries web page is found at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingCommercial.main>.

If, during the summer, fishermen have information or questions concerning the commercial fishery, the Soldotna Division of Commercial Fisheries staff can be reached by phone at 262-9368, by fax at 262-4709, or by mail at 43961 Kalifornsky Beach Road, Suite B, Soldotna, 99669.

or

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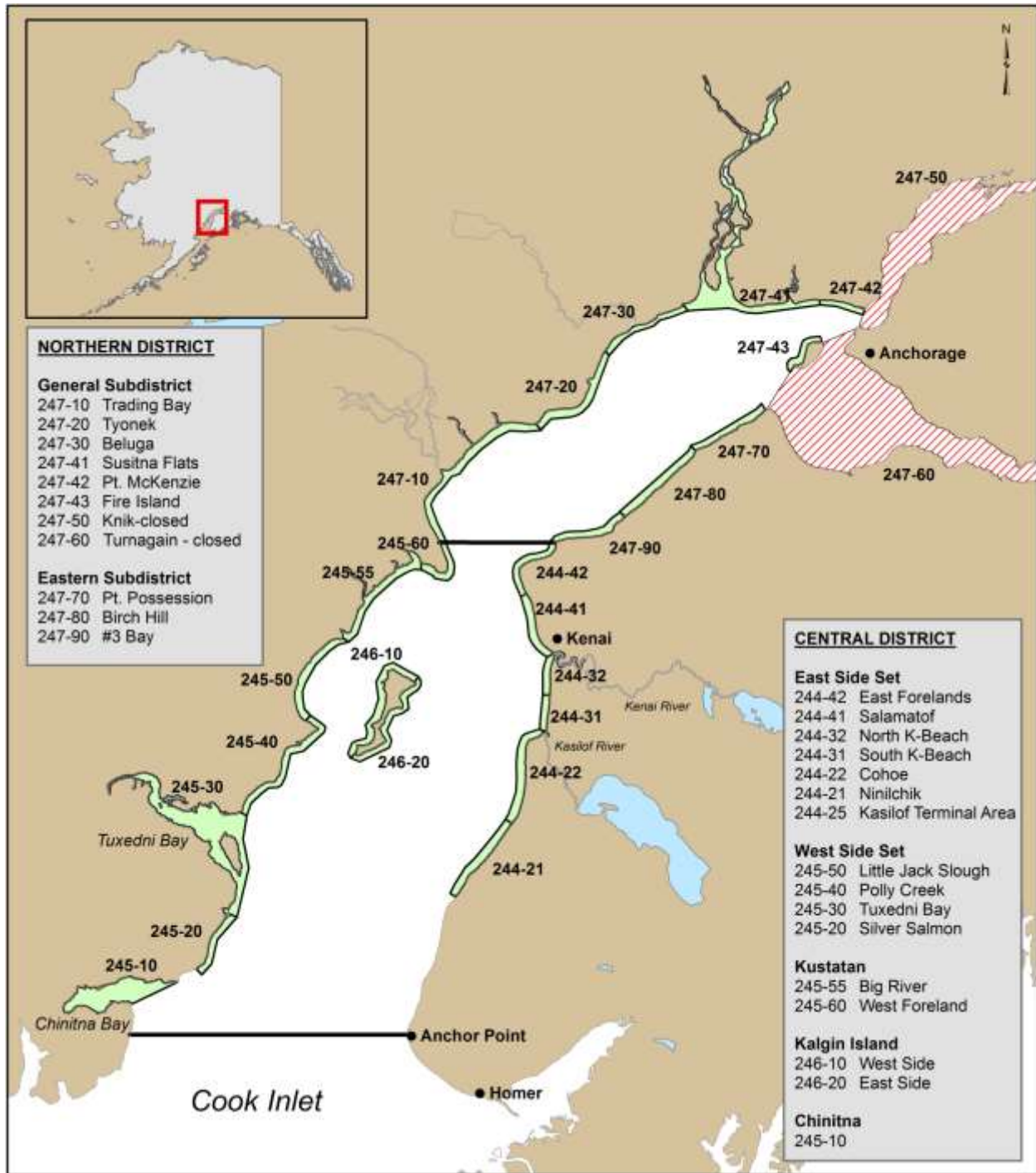


Figure 1. – Upper Cook Inlet commercial set gillnet statistical areas. The North Kalifornsky Beach (NKB) statistical area is 244-32.

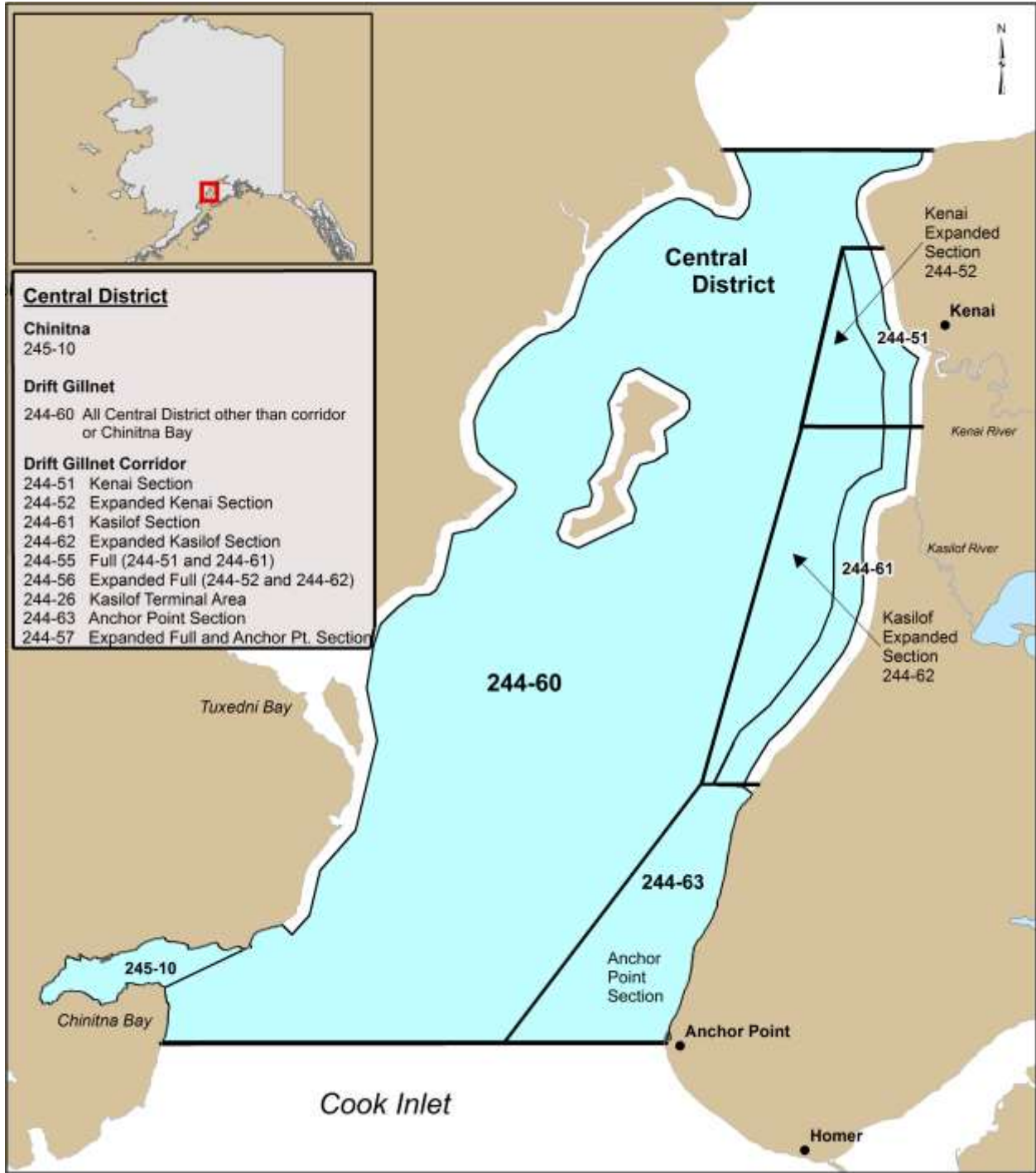


Figure 2. – Map of drift gillnet statistical areas.

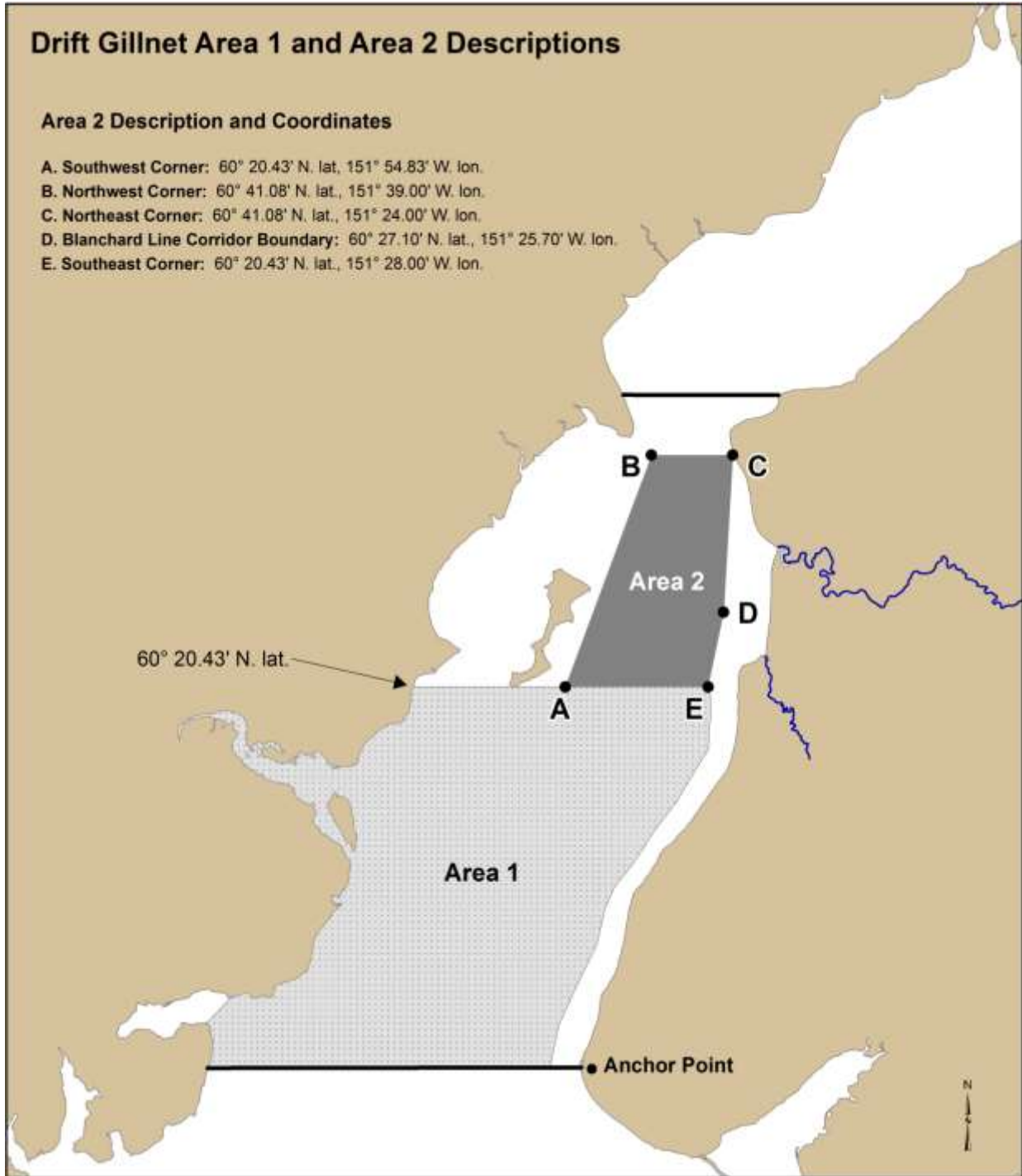


Figure 3.– Map of drift gillnet areas 1 and 2.

Latitude and Longitude are based on the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83), equivalent to the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 84).

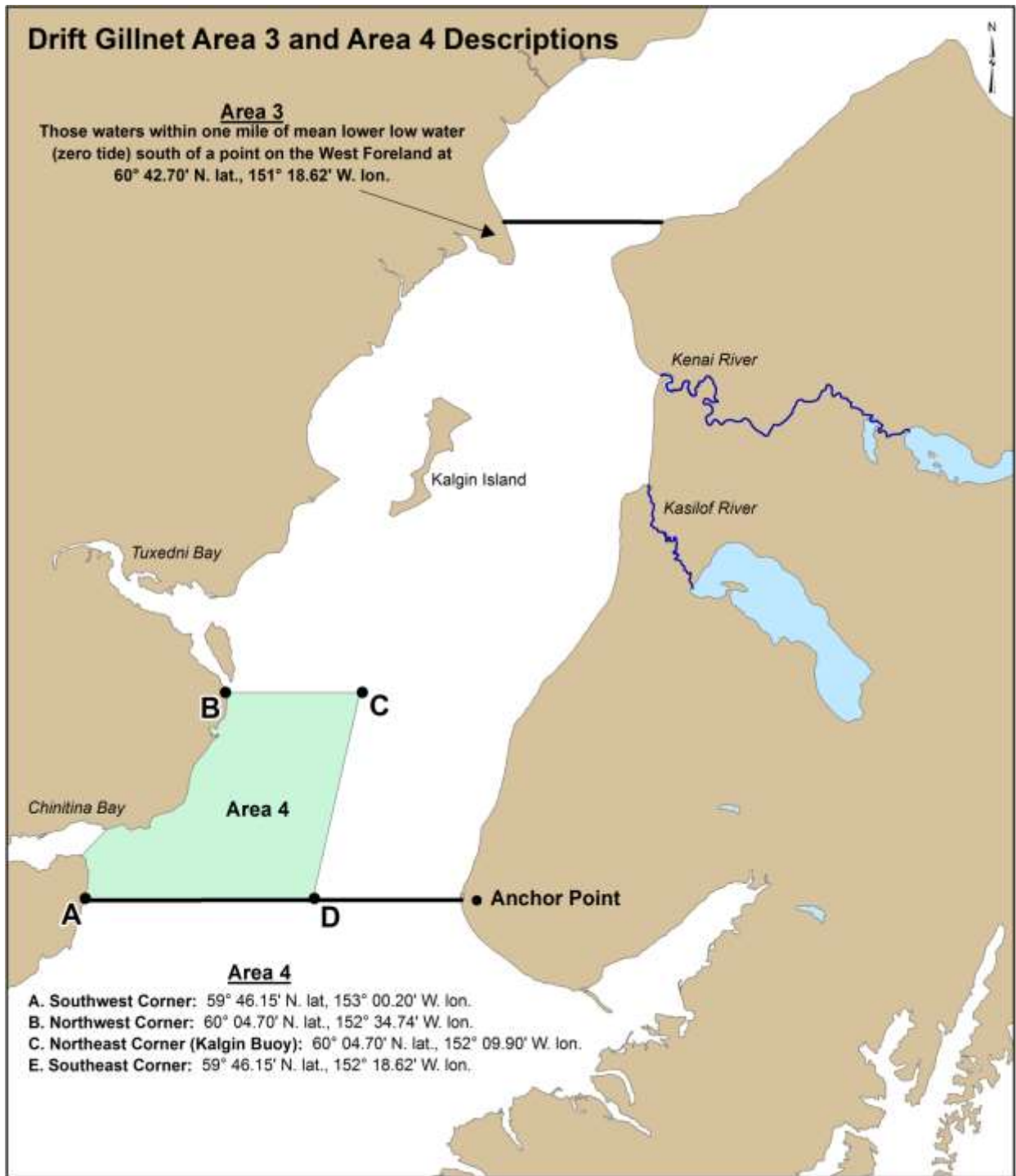


Figure 4.– Map of the drift gillnet areas 3 and 4; open after August 15.

Latitude and Longitude are based on the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83), equivalent to the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 84).